

Naturalization Speech – July 2018

Congressman Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan

Good morning Chief Judge Ramona Manglona, honored guests, family and friends, my fellow Americans.

Congratulations to all of you, who are about to be sworn in as citizens of this great nation, the United States of America. And how wonderful, that you are being sworn in on the eve of a day of great historic significance for both our country and the Marianas.

July 4 is America's Independence Day – and it's been 242 years since the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, when the people of what were then 13 colonies moved to free themselves from the British empire and launched the American revolution. The world has not been the same since.

Today you join more than 14,000 other individuals who will be taking their Oath of Allegiance and, like you, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance as new citizens in 175 ceremonies across the nation.

July 4 is also Liberation Day for the Marianas – and in 2018 we mark 72 years since the opening of the civilian camps in Susupe and Chalan Kanoa, when the people of these islands were once more free to resettle and rebuild their lives, from the ashes of World War II. Before long, the people of the Marianas would press for a closer relationship with the United States, achieving commonwealth status in 1976, and U.S. citizenship in 1986.

So you, my fellow Americans, are new members of a fairly young nation and an even younger commonwealth. Our great experiment in democracy continues to this day. We are always striving towards that “more perfect union.”

Our journeys are marked by important crossroads and turning points that redirect our paths. You made a major decision that changed your course and the course of your family when you decided to move to the Marianas. You packed up your life and left everything behind.

Whether you made the move for work, love, family, adventure, or simply a better life - it was a courageous step.

And like millions of immigrants before you, and like so many people in the Marianas today, you **chose** to become citizens. That took courage.

It took hard work, tenacity, and a conscious decision to embrace the values upon which this country is founded: That belief that all people are created equal. That conviction that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are our God-given and inalienable rights. That unshakeable faith that regardless of race, religion, or status, the American dream is possible for all.

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Each of you has your own story of struggle, doubt, perseverance, and success. And today we not only celebrate your success: we also celebrate your **courage**.

Courage, too, is part of our collective bedrock of values. It took courage for the American revolutionaries to declare a new nation. It took courage for our founding fathers and mothers of the commonwealth to venture out from the internment camps to start their lives over and, in time, to forge a new and unique political relationship with America.

As you take your oath today, and swear allegiance to our country, let courage continue to be your guide. Be bold and brave in your citizenship. Pursue your education or career goals. Start a business. Serve your community. Vote. Participate as fully as you can in civic life. Embrace the opportunities – and the responsibilities - that lie ahead.

Remember that in America, and here in the Marianas, you are valued. Your talents, experiences, and perspectives enrich our community, and make us stronger as a nation.

Congratulations, again. May God bless you and your families. And may God bless the Northern Mariana Islands, and the United States of America.